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ABSTRACT

In this paper the author questions whether teachers should be held accountable in social studies. Accountability is viewed by the majority of educators as having its own merit due in part, perhaps, to recent emphasis placed on behavioral objectives and the way in which these objectives allow for performance measurement. Care must be taken that what is measured is not meaningless information. However, the more relevant educational perceptions, skills, understandings, and conclusions emphasized in the new social studies are difficult to put into behavioral objective terms. It is advocated that educators be held accountable for their actions, rather than the actions of others. Teacher accountability should relate primarily to the skills or process dimension of social studies, to arranging the necessary environment, and providing meaningful social studies topics from which students can make selections. When educators are held accountable for student actions, the thinking and actions of students become controlled to produce manageable, measureable behavior essentially at odds with the new social studies. In conclusion, the student, rather than the teacher, needs to be accountable for knowledge, skills, attitudes gained from the encounters planned by the teacher. (SJM)

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN SOCIAL STUDIES--
A QUESTIONING VIEW

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Introduction

"Accountability, we need to be accountable for our actions." With schools spending increasing sums of money on innovative programs in social studies and the public increasing their interest in all aspects of education, accountability has become a "front-page" issue. Articles focus on accountability, books delineate the numerous aspects of the issue, and speakers "keynote" the topic at conventions. States are developing performance-based programs to identify contributing members from noncontributing members within the educational arena.

Accountability has developed in part from the behavioral objective movement, an attempt to incorporate precision into educational efforts. In numerous books flooding the market, authors exhort teachers to formulate precise objectives and provide practical guidelines for objective formulation.

The striving for precision is commendable provided we in education do not develop narrow objectives about meaningless information, providing we do not demand that every child perform as every other child. It seems that even precisely stated behavioral objectives indicating the behavior, the situation in which the behavior is demonstrated, and the criterion for success should only serve as guides. Individuals should be allowed to deviate upwards from the indicated behaviors. Not everyone need perform the same behavior in an identical situation to an equivalent

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degree unless a strong case can be argued that such similarities are requisite for a student comprehending a required and necessary conclusion or mastering a skill. Perhaps in some situations, such a case can be presented along the lines of mastery learning.

Accountability also is related to the incorporation of some systems concepts into education. Numerous means-ends models necessitate that at the outset of educational effort, we indicate the types of product desired as a result of our energies. Of course, students are not products, neither are students some material which sits passively while someone performs some tasks upon them. One can use the means-end model in industry when speaking of diminishing the time for producing televisions or cars, but one has to adjust the model when speaking of motivating and assisting students to obtain understandings, to formulate generalizations, and to apply them to myriad situations.

In this paper, I am not going to develop a case against accountability, but rather urge our approaching accountability with a questioning view, with a certain amount of skepticism as to the nature of accountability. We need to investigate just what this term means to its various advocates and to inquire into the consequences of accepting one interpretation as opposed to another.

An Interpretation of Accountability

It appears that many of us have boarded a bandwagon comprising a collection of slogans. Accountability has been waved from the "educational housetops" by its advocates exhorting us to accept their views.

"Educators worth their salt must hold themselves accountable for students' behaviors. If students experience your class and fail to demonstrate behaviors as indicated in nicely worded objectives, you have not done

your thing; you are ineffectual." When educators attempt to reduce some of the ambiguity relating to the concept, they often times receive the frowns of their peers. "How can you be against being accountable?" Also, increasing numbers of public groups are demanding opportunities to educate students where they will assume accountability for student progress. Much of the alternative education movement has taken this tack. It is interesting to note with the push for teachers to be accountable, that the most recent Gallup poll as reported in the Phi Delta Kappan¹ indicates that the majority of individuals in the national survey (57 per cent) placed the blame for children doing poorly in school on the children's home life. Even parents (53 per cent) of school children considered the home life most responsible for lack of student success in the schools.

Of course, having the majority of the public considering the home accountable for children's success or lack of it, still makes others accountable for the learning of students. This poll should not cause us to cease our search for a definition of accountability or a series of definitions to which we can have some semblance of agreement.

Felix Lopez² over two years ago defined accountability as referring "to the process of expecting each member of an organization to answer to someone for doing specific things according to specific plans and against certain timetables to accomplish tangible performance results. It assumes that everyone who joins an organization does so presumably to help in the achievement of its purposes; it assumes that individual behavior which contributes to these purposes is functional and that which does not is dysfunctional."

¹George H. Gallup, "The Fourth Annual Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes Toward Education." Phi Delta Kappan. 54:33-46; September 1972.

²Felix Lopez, "Accountability in Education." Phi Delta Kappan. 52: December 1970.

Accountability, according to Lopez, refers to the functionality of an individual's behavior. I would not disagree with that. However, in education it is popularly held that the functionality of a teacher is determined by whether the teacher's actions have caused children to learn specific skills, ideas, values, understandings, concepts, generalizations, and attitudes. Tersely put, accountability, as commonly interpreted by a large percentage of educators relates to students' behaviors. Teachers are accountable for what their students do. The Lopez definition of course can defend this majority view. However, a case can be developed for having teachers accountable for their own actions and not those of their pupils.

Barry Beyer in the preface to his book posits some questions relating to the function of social studies that center on the accountability question. Beyer asks his reader to consider

Should it be a function of social studies to stuff children's minds with other peoples' perceptions of reality? To make them first spongers and then parrots? To make their heads nothing more than data storage bins--bins full of answers to questions they never asked? To teach them to accept unquestioningly someone else's perception of 'the way it is'--or was? Or should it be a function of social studies to teach youngsters how to establish their own perceptions of reality in more honest, rational, and reliable ways, how to evaluate what others present as the truth, how to find out for themselves?

Most of us would accept that social studies should stimulate the latter in children. However, if we provide students opportunities to process information according to their own interests, if we structure situations in which they can choose which values they will accept, if we schedule confrontations from which they can formulate their own understandings, we risk them gaining perceptions, skills, understandings, and conclusions that cannot be written precisely into behavioral objectives.

³ Barry K. Beyer. Inquiry in the Social Studies Classroom. Columbus, Ohio: 1971, P. V.

Additionally, we are in danger of our students formulating conclusions or values which may be at odds with the local or even national community. These students may achieve understandings about myriad content that was neither planned for in a narrowly defined curriculum, nor endorsed by the local education leaders. But, this seems to be what the new social studies is all about.

If this be so, then how can we be held responsible for such legions of behavior. Must the teacher be held responsible when students, in a choice situation, select a view which may be at odds with the overall community? Must the teacher who allows students opportunities to confront content they find meaningful be held accountable if those students do not then know some of the major battles of the American Revolution?

If we hold the teacher responsible for the "deficiencies" in students' learning, we are equating teaching with salesmanship. The teacher-salesman has not taught unless the pupil has bought-learned. It seems to me that we are in a classic dilemma. On the one hand, we are advocating more diversity and relevance in the social studies curriculum, and on the other hand we are attempting to schedule encounters in which we strive to control and mold student behaviors to exemplify those found acceptable by the society.

Our Accountability

What are we paid for? Certainly we educators should be accountable for our actions. As Lopez says, we should be answerable to someone for doing specific things according to specific plans and against certain time tables. The issue, as I view it, is not accountability as such, but rather centers on the things for which we are to be accountable. I believe our accountability should focus on our actions, not the actions of others.

We should be held accountable for "doing our thing." We should resist being forced into situations where we are to be accountable for others doing "their thing," or rather others "doing our thing."

Our accountability in social studies should relate to our furnishing the necessary stimuli for reaction, arranging the necessary environment, supplying the necessary support materials for pupil investigation, and providing meaningful social studies topics from which students can make selections. Our accountability relates further to scheduling opportunities in which students also can determine topics of interest and can organize their strategies of investigation.

Of course, we are accountable for providing guidance in necessary and sufficient quantities to enable students to process their social studies experiences. We do have to hold ourselves accountable for providing students with knowledge of methods for processing information in a depth sufficient for them to actively function within the social studies curriculum. Students require knowledge about the major steps of inquiry. They need to understand the major types of questions they can formulate and the questioning strategies possible for dealing with countless social studies topics.*

But this accountability relates primarily to the skills or process dimension of social studies. Here, we can perhaps come to agreement as to the nature and the specific skills necessary for students to process social studies data. But, one can develop the case that outside of essential skills, there is little in the content dimension of social studies that all students need to experience and experience in the same ways. Not all students need to study the American Revolution to become good citizens.

* The reader is urged to read Questioning Strategies and Techniques by F. P. Hunkins, (Allyn and Bacon, 1972) to obtain ways of making questioning meaningful.

Not all students must investigate the Central American Countries to understand mono-culture and its effect upon world trade, nor do all students need to probe the American Indian cultures to comprehend the contributions of these peoples to our culture.

In those areas of social studies where we believe students must have knowledge, such as skills, we really do not give the students choice, alternatives. Students must learn the material planned, and they must react to it or apply it in a teacher-determined way. Here we are accountable, but we are controlling the thinking and actions of students. They do not have the freedom to choose skills when we as educators are to be held accountable for their expertise in using them.

However, as previously noted, the majority of social studies education does not deal with necessary and essential skills. The majority of social studies topics can allow students to utilize their analytical skills in reacting to social studies content and situations in ways that will allow them to develop their own perceptions. Social studies should provide encounters where students can engage in meaningful decision-making resulting in purposeful conclusions and commitment to action based on carefully considered values.

MacDonald in writing about responsible curriculum development defined responsibility to mean "respond-ability" in terms of criteria which account for the variety of persons within the school experience.⁴ He considered that most current curriculum projects lacked this quality and that part of this lack was due to the narrow interpretation of accountability. If we require teachers to be accountable for pupil behavior, pupils' thoughts, most likely we are going to reduce the variety of student behavior. Fewer

⁴James B. MacDonald. "Responsible Curriculum Development" in Elliot Eisner (Ed.) Confronting Curriculum Reform. Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1971.

student behaviors, views, understandings, and conclusions are more manageable. Such an approach ignores the diverse needs and interests of students. Certainly, educators will refrain from placing their heads "on the block" for myriad possible student behaviors. If I am to be judged effective or ineffective by what my social studies students do, by their actions, by their beliefs, then I am going to control their actions, their beliefs. Most assuredly, I am not going to provide students opportunities to choose, for their choice may jeopardize my educational security. Therefore, students will "choose" only those topics, activities, will only arrive at those conclusions, those values, and only demonstrate those behaviors considered appropriate by the public to which I am accountable. Accountability in the narrow sense forces the educator to attempt control of students rather than striving to provide guidance and encouragement to students to enable them to increase their autonomy.

Is This the New Social Studies?

Is this the new social studies, a game of control? From the legions of books dealing with the new social studies and discovery learning, it appears to me that our accountability lies in our behaviors which free the student, not control him. Certainly, we should be accountable for doing our thing. But, as mentioned previously in this paper, our thing is providing students with myriad topics possessing relevance, providing students with situations of choice, in some cases total choice, as to which topic or dimension of a topic they can investigate.

The public should hold us accountable in social studies for scheduling encounters that instill in students a desire to process information in such ways as to arrive at conclusions that can be applied to their present and future functioning. Have we provided the necessary

materials? Have we selected the potential topics, those that will provide students with opportunities to gain productive insights? Have we provided students with the necessary guidance to become skilled in the several social science methodologies requisite for processing social science phenomena? Have we provided students with opportunities to gain skills in formulating effective questions and have we furnished students situations in which to become proficient in the valuing process so they can internalize their beliefs and effectively analyze the beliefs of others? If we can answer affirmatively to the above questions, then I feel we, as social studies educators, have done our thing according to specific plans and against certain timetables.

Student Accountability

Throughout this discussion on accountability, little mention has been made regarding the accountability of the student for his knowledge of process, for his valuing, for his skills, for his understandings and conclusions. Learning results in education only when the student interacts with people, situations, with content. Part of the interaction involves the teacher, but the student is accountable for his role in the interaction dyad.

If students reject the opportunities to investigate topics, if they refuse to apply the skills of investigation to issues, if they abuse the valuing process, or if they formulate conclusions at odds with the overall society, the public cannot hold the educator primarily accountable. The public must center the accountability issue on the student. Of course, if students have experienced a meaningful social studies curriculum it is unlikely that they will behave in irrational and unproductive ways. But that does not mean that the public will appreciate all student conclusions or actions.

Consequences of This View

If we accept the position that we are accountable for doing our thing and not for what the student does with the knowledge, skills and attitudes attained from the encounters planned by the teacher, we will be free to engage in creative teaching. We will be encouraged to provide diverse topics and learning opportunities for our students, and we will be at ease in urging students to make honest choices, and to challenge social studies content. We will be highly motivated to provide students with situations which will stimulate diverse learnings as well as common learnings encountered in uncommon ways.

However, if we reject this view and maintain that we are accountable for the learnings and actions of our students, we will engage in the "game" of control, control of students' thinking and actions. We will engage in indoctrinating students to provide a narrowly defined citizen. But, if free and intelligent action is to be stimulated in social studies, then we can only be held accountable for providing the situations in which such freedom can be nurtured and for providing the guidance for effective interaction. We cannot be held accountable for the choices individuals make in such freedom. The individual student alone must assume this accountability.